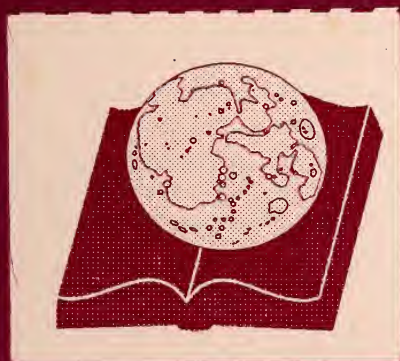


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Microcosm . . .

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Each year the Division of Humanities of Copiah-Lincoln Community College holds a literary competition for college and area high school students. Selected college entries compete in the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and in the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The judges for the high school division of 1991 competition include the members of the *Microcosm* staff, the English Composition Honors II Class, and the English faculty. English faculty assisted in the selections of the college manuscripts submitted to the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and to the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The English faculty: Sharon Alexander, Edna Earle Crews, Nancy Dykes, Evelyn Sutton, and Durr Walker, Jr., Chairman of Humanities.

The administration of Copiah-Lincoln Community College: Billy B. Thames, President; Howell Garner, Dean of Instruction; Jim Kyzar, Business Manager; Ray Ishee, Dean of Students; Russell Ray, Dean of Student Development; and Harriet Vickers, Director of Public Information.

Cover design by Bryan Thompson

Illustrators Gretchen Brown, Willie Harrell, Harvey Temples, Vicki Ward

College Contributors:

Stacy Barham, Debbie Box, Christy Feduccia, Micki Freels, Jill Fuller, Ronnie Haley, Mitch Holloway, De'Ana Lee, Melanie Moak, Kathy Odom, Carolyn Rudder, Margaret Tynes, and Vicki Ward

Microcosm staff: Kathy Odom***, Editor; Micki Freels***, Associate Editor; Debbie Box**, Cindy Boutwell*, Jan Brown**, Rose Brown***, Amanda Calcote*, Jill Fuller**, Shane Henderson**, Mitch Holloway**, Chris Keyes**, Lanelle King**, Penny King*, Robin King*, Rod Martin**, Brad Morgan***, Lee Myers***, Rhoda Patterson*, Chad Price**, Jonathan Sasser*, Angela Strange***, and Laura Turpin**

* first semester, ** second semester, *** both semesters

Faculty Advisors Edna Earle Crews and Tom Ross

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Literary Hall of Fame

The Rev. Graham R. Hodges of Liverpool, New York, a Wesson native, is the 1991 Literary Hall of Fame recipient at Copiah-Lincoln Community College.

Hodges is a 1933 graduate of Copiah-Lincoln Agricultural High School and a 1935 graduate of Copiah-Lincoln with an associate of arts degree. He received a bachelor of arts degree in 1937 from the University of Mississippi and a bachelor of divinity from Yale University Divinity School in 1940.

The Rev. Hodges served in various church-related areas before entering the ministry. He was pastor of Ticonderoga and Crown Point Congregational Churches (United Church of Christ) from 1949-1956 and of Emmanuel Church in Watertown, New York, from 1956 to 1979.

His selection to the Hall of Fame is based upon his authoring seven published religious books for children by Abingdon Press, a Methodist publishing house in Nashville.

His latest book, available in paperback, is a collection of fifty-two children's sermons titled, *Did Jesus Go to Church?*

Additionally, he has published hundreds of articles in religious and secular press. He has worked in every area of church life including various levels of local, association and state conferences. He has served as chairman of committees, chaplain, dean of youth conferences, moderator of the New York Conference, United Church of Christ, 1971. He preached the Conference Communion Sunday Sermon in 1979. He has further shared in many other church responsibilities.

The Rev. Hodges, former chairman of the Board of Directors of the New York State Heart Assembly, is a member of the National Board of Directors of the American Heart Association. He is founder and president of Planned Parenthood of Northern New York and New York State Coalition for Family Planning. Voted as Watertown's most valuable citizen in 1963, he has served as a member of the Advisory Board of Community Savings Bank in Watertown.

His wife, Elsie, who is a Registered Nurse, is a graduate off Mt. Holyoke and Yale University. A certified New York State elementary teacher, Mrs. Hodges taught in Watertown for sixteen years.

The Hodges, married forty-nine years, are parents of four children. They also have six grandchildren.



EDITOR'S NOTES . . .

Since the fall of 1973, the Division of Humanities at Copiah-Lincoln Community College has sponsored an annual *Microcosm* competition for college and high school students. The contributing writers, judges and *Microcosm* staff are like a beehive of drones buzzing with activity about their duties. In fact, the beehive could be defined as "a community, village, etc.. regarded as a miniature or epitome of the world" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition). However, the "little world; miniature universe" is also the definition of a microcosm. The staff hopes the pages within this volume will open your understanding and give you insight to microcosms within and beyond your imagination.

"To Hirim," a one-act play by Allen Cooper, won first place in the 1991 Southern Literary Festival Competition and third place in the 1991 MCCCWA. The play placed first in last year's *Microcosm* High School Competition. It appears in Volume XVII, Spring 1990, *Microcosm* for your reading pleasure.

"Jessie's Veil," a drama by Micki Freels, won Honorable Mention in the 1991 Southern Literary Festival Competition. The drama also received Honorable Mention in the 1990 MCCCWA. It appears in Volume XVII, Spring 1990, *Microcosm* for your enjoyment.

Microcosm 1991 High School Awards

Fiction

1st Place,

Scholarship Award "His Father's Son" James M. Martin
Crystal Springs Attendance Center

2nd Place "The Unexpected Guest" Cynthia Reed
Bogue Chitto High School

3rd Place "All That Glitters" Kay Kay Smith
Brookhaven Academy

*Honorable Mention "Blind Faith" Michael Russell
Lawrence County High School

*Honorable Mention "Heart of Darkness" Dasha L. Allred
Brookhaven Academy

Poetry

1st Place

Scholarship Award "Lament of a Non-Poet" Michael Russell
Lawrence County High School

2nd Place "Ample Cerebral Tension" Matthew Calhoun
Lawrence County High School

2nd Place "Silent Redeemer" Kay Kay Smith
Brookhaven Academy

3rd Place "Hope for Tomorrow" Lonnie Boyd
Bogue Chitto High School

*Honorable Mention "Music Without Melody" Shelly Herrington
Lawrence County High School

General Essay

1st Place,

Scholarship Award "Beneath It All" Shelley Herrington
Lawrence County High School

2nd Place "Finding Reassurance in God's Creations" Robin Burnham
Magee High School

3rd Place "Little Angel" Lindsay Thompson
Crystal Springs Attendance Center

* The staff regrets that these selections could not be printed because of funding problems.

Fiction

Aftermath

Vicki Ward

When asked years later, Jenna and her friends could never quite clearly remember the last few days before there was war. Now children simply thought of her and her friends as the "people in the rest home across town." The four old people would talk and comment on the goings-on around them all day; there wasn't much else to do in the building. Yet somehow their talk always came to rest on one of two subjects. Days-before-the-war stories included long, drawn-out memories from childhood until the night it began; or how-much-things-have-changed tales of life after the war started compared to the relative calm of the rat-race days before it became final. The four had obviously never been exposed to Miss Manners as children, each would ramble on in spite of the other's mumblings and expletives exploding around them. The four would continue, embellishing moments and giving any listener a sound-by-sound replay of their lives. Generally, the staff in the rest home ignored these ramblings as bits of senile brain tissue spewing out. Sometimes, only sometimes, a young doctor or nurse would listen attentively while they fed their charges or cleaned them up. These young people could not remember when the war was not going on. The stories entranced them, gave the young people an inkling of what their childhood could have been like.

When Jenna and her friends were in their early twenties war descended on the world. Bullheaded governments and pitiful attempts at peace had reduced most livable areas to plains of dust and wind. In the last few weeks before war began ecologists had built domes to grow food and raise meat for the cities. So many things had changed, the very air was poisoned and heated to the point of being dangerous after ten unsheltered minutes in it. Bombs dropped round the world had left huge areas of land desolate and unlivable except for small homes and communities sealed from the noxious winds.

Even now, seventy-five years later, occasional fighting and constant terrorist-type warfare took place. The whole world was reduced to bubbles of population no larger than two-hundred people. Jenna had come to this small community some forty years before, after her only living child had died of radioactive poisoning. Her oldest child, a son, died in the second decade of the war, leaving Jenna and her daughter alone. Jenna's husband was also dead, a casualty of an early car bomb. Jenna's family were now scattered, no one could find any of her cousins or other relatives, not that it mattered.

Forty years looking at windblown sand. Days lasted forever when all you ever did was remember. The young children who came to visit once a week thought the four elderly patients looked like they knew God personally, that they certainly looked like all the pictures they'd seen. Jenna remembered thinking that very same thought at their age. But children their age are mere babies when you are ninety-seven years old. By

the time you reached Jenna's age you had changed your way of thinking, but truly hoped you were closer to God — if age counted in heaven.

Often Jenna and her comrade closest in age, Allen, would sit in the solarium and simultaneously relive moments of their childhoods with each other. Jenna always crocheting an afghan of some size or another while Allen stared at his wedding ring as he spun the band round and round his finger. They agreed they were happier then, and then fell to talking as always about the last few days of peace.

Anytime she had to board transportation outside the home Jenna would let everyone know just how much things had changed. Back in her day you didn't need a gas mask to just walk out to the car and your skin wouldn't fry in just minutes. Jenna would remember bikinis, shorts, halter tops and days at the beach with the gulls screaming over-head. Now the ozone layer was completely gone and if any-thing lived outside of a sealed community or building no one knew.

Birds. Jenna missed birds most of all. Often nights she would fall asleep thinking of them; dreaming of them all night long. No birds now, they couldn't live in the dry, dusty oven that was the outdoors.

Many days the staff would have to sedate Jenna and her friends when talk arose of futile governmental tactics in those last few days. Today had been one of those days, now Jenna sat alone in the solarium staring at the now-dead plains outside the window. She felt sick to her stomach, the whole memory of those beginning days of the war left her disillusioned, nauseous, and almost breathless, like falling flat on your stomach from a tree.

Jenna believed too much thinking had been done after the war started and not nearly enough done to try to avoid it. True enough, hindsight is 20/20 and governments are blind; but precious little could've been done by ordinary citizens like Jenna. Now she just wanted to sleep; forever. Patty, one of Jenna's favorite staff members, wheeled Jenna to her room and helped her into bed. The nurse would often be the only person to sit and listen to Jenna's memories. Patty loved the stories of her charge's childhood and teenage years, listened to them for hours on end.

"Jenna, look what I have for you. A tape, a friend of mine recorded for me. Remember I told you of my friend at the San Diego containment community? You're going to love this!"

"What, Patty? I'm so tired, dear. I just want to sleep and never wake up. Not have to stare at that wretched wasteland. They could have done more. They should have done more. So sleepy."

"Hear it, Jenna? It's the aviary at the San Diego Zoo. They sound so beautiful, like flutes! I see why you miss them so."

"Yes, Patty, beautiful. So sleepy now. Poor Allen, he's next now. Yes, like flutes with wings. So delicate. 'Night Patty."

"Good night, Jenna. I'm going to let this play until you fall asleep. Sweet dreams."

Patty turned and looked at Jenna when she reached the doorway. Jenna looked so small and forlorn, her small smile barely visible. Patty thought that the older

residents must know God personally, they certainly looked like all the pictures she'd seen.

An hour later Patty returned to get her tape. Jenna's smile was still visible. Patty touched her friend's hand warmly and thought Jenna would always be able to hear birds now. For surely there would be birds in heaven.



Harvey Temples

Call to Arms

De'Ana Lee

He walks away and you see the last glimpse of his face through the plane window. The months ahead will be long and hard. You walk away holding tight the hands of your children saying, "Daddy will be home soon." When you walk in the house none of the rooms look the same. The den looks lonely, the kitchen tiring and the bedroom with its rumpled pillows only make you miss him more. I suppose it'll be all right. You'll get through the days the best you can and the nights as quickly as you can, hoping not to disturb the children with your tears. In the morning, you'll fix pop-tarts and send them off with hugs and kisses. The bus stops, they get on and the house is empty again.

You stare at the clock on the wall, wanting to call time out, to tell him you are sorry for every harsh word, to say I love you one more time. But it does no good to mope so the dishes get washed, the floor swept and mopped, the bathrooms cleaned and all the beds made. Now you have to go to school. How do you listen to the teachers when your mind and heart are in Kuwait? The professor could drone on for hours and you'd never hear a word.

It's turning fall now, the cool soft wind rushes across your shoulders, perfect for a warm hug, instead you hold yourself tight. It seems like this time last year you and he took the kids to the zoo and had a picnic. You stopped at every cage, every bathroom, every empty cave. It was the zoo! Both of you laughed at the enthusiasm of your children, wishing things could still be as new and breathtaking to you. Today you're wishing for the ordinary, no more surprises, just a warm meal when you get home and a tired husband to massage.

You wonder if he's all right there. Is it very hot? Laughing sadly, you realize you're waiting for a letter to hear about the weather. After all, paper and pen can only do so much, they can't bring him home.

A friendly hug feels so good now. You're mother-in-law calls to see how you're holding up. You don't tell her that there's a constant knot in your throat and a heaviness of heart that feels like someone has placed a cross on your back. Your friends offer to take the children for a day but you wouldn't dare let them go. The people at your church say they'll be praying and it's comforting but it worries you to be right behind "God, can we have a little rain." You need someone to fill the emptiness and your favorite songs try so hard. But, he'll be back soon, you know.

The news comes on every night and the diplomats talk. Bush says it should be a short war. You wonder if he knows how many wives are grieving. The war rages on, carrying your husband farther away. You'd turn off the set if fear would let you. Unconsciously you start to sing "War is Hell on the Homefront Too." Then you laugh at yourself for being silly. Sometimes you wonder what you fought for in the seventies. You chanted "War is not healthy for children and other living things." Where did all the peace signs go? Did love and tranquility disappear or were they ever there. When you met him you were wearing love beads, bell bottoms, and a tie-dyed shirt. It hurts to think of that now. Perhaps on the next presidential ballot you'll vote Timothy Leary, someone has to clean up the politicians' garbage.

Outside the wind blows harder and tiny drops of rain cascade against the window. He would be home early today. Maybe it'll rain so hard that they call off the war. Of course, this war has lasted through many years of rain and harsh weather. You wonder how many lives have been lost on a day like this. It's time to cook supper, the kids will be home soon, wet and tired. You know it's no fun for them to ride the bus home in the rain, it's so damp and dirty on a bus when it's raining. They've been through a lot in the past few weeks. Trying to understand a war and military is not easy for a six-year old and not nice for a twelve-year old. The youngest comes home and watches cartoons. Your oldest goes to his room, like he has done every day. You know you have to be patient and strong for both of them. When cartoons are over the youngest comes in the kitchen with a puzzled look on her face. "Will Daddy be back in time for open-house at school?"

"I don't know, sweetie, but probably not. He's very busy."

"But I wanted to show him the butterfly I made in class today it has huge wings."

What do you say? She leaves and you know she'll forget about it until you get ready to leave, then it'll be twenty questions all over again. You call your oldest to come eat but he's not hungry. He's stuck between Daddy is a hero and a very bad mood. Neither helps you communicate with him any better. Sometimes you try to remember what it was like to be twelve, and you remember that beginning teenage days weren't always all they were cracked up to be. You sulked just like he is doing now about things you didn't understand. Today you'd like to sit down next to him and sulk too. What else in your life could possibly change right now.

Then the bills come and the checkbook needs to be balanced and you're the one who has to budget after avoiding it for so many years. Isn't this the way divorced women feel. But that's depressing, he's coming back. As you scratch numbers on pieces of paper you wonder what the women there look like. Are they ugly? You know that they aren't allowed to speak but prostitution has been around for many years. No, he wouldn't cheat on you but for the first time you realize that this is about his loneliness too. He's away from his home, his children and the woman he loves. He needs you just as much as you need him and you always told him to be careful, maybe he'll remember that now. Every time he drives anywhere or does anything life threatening, the first words out of your mouth are "BE CAREFUL!" He knows just how serious you always are, but you wonder if he's thinking about that now.

You know you should have thought about this before you married someone in the National Guard. You never did like the idea but what does he do? Drop out, of course not. So, you live with it and so do your children and the rest of your family.

This morning, the rain stopped and some of the pain stopped. You got a letter yesterday and it brought many tears to your eyes but it also reassured. Today you've vowed to try harder to be strong for your children. They don't understand quite as well as you do and they need a mother not a complete wreck. He should be able to come home in three months. Yesterday you bought a special calendar for the occasion to mark off the days and you pulled out an old teddy that he gave you in high school. It's what you slept with then without him and it's what you'll sleep with now until he

comes home. Most nights your little girl comes and crawls in bed with you anyway and these days you don't mind. And yesterday you told your mother-in-law that she can borrow the kids as soon as he comes home. He'll be back, you know.



Willie Harrell

Scents and Sights

Carolyn Rudder

A clear bright day in mid-morning they could see the rig in the distance from their house across the fields of cotton and corn. The working, grinding of the rig sounded day and night, but it was as natural and numb to the ears as trains roaring and rumbling daily past houses.

Two young lads — Floyd, ten and Lloyd, eight — at play as boys often do in rural Arkansas — chase and rough-housing. It was an oilfield settlement. Papa, an oilfield derrick hand. A game of play — they were hands on the rig — Floyd and Lloyd in their coveralls, pretending as young 'uns often do. Today Floyd was the driller, Lloyd, the toolpusher. Interrupting their play, they caught a glimpse of something falling from the rig in the distance — which wasn't really out of the ordinary — probably the block.

Scents of rabbit stew flowed from the kitchen — bubbling and steaming from the old iron pot, waving and easing its way through the door, across the screen porch and on to the corner of the yard, making contact with the young workers senses, letting them know that it was almost time to shut the rig down. Mama knew that she'd be cooking stew when she had seen Floyd walking proudly beside Papa yesterday, dragging home the huge swamp rabbit that he'd killed with the new .410 shotgun. Papa had bought him last month. He was a good Papa, always taking time out with his boys.

Floyd said, "Let's go see if the block hit anything 'fore Mama calls us to eat."

Off they raced on the shortcut through the cow pasture, then headed back to the road. Way down the dirt road, dust was boiling and swirling as a wagon, tiny as a bug, made its way toward the settlement. On and on it came, snaking its way closer; dust rising and settling, covering everything in its path. Soon the boys could tell it was old Henry, the mule skinner, making his way to town like he was headed to a fire. They jumped out of the road, clearing his path.

Today he didn't pass them by as they were waving him on, but pulled up sharply, enveloping them all with dust, hollering, "Quick, quick — go tell yo mama not to worry, but Mr. Shorty, yo papa, he done fell from the rig and is dead. Yah, Eyah!"

The mules obeyed Henry's command, turned around and rushed the wagon back toward the rig. Staring out like statues, the two numbed boys whirled around and hastily retraced their path through the pasture. Floyd cleared the barbed wire fence, but Lloyd yelled "help!" Floyd circled back and with a quick tug tore Lloyd's faded britches from the sharp barb. The two breathless boys raced into the house calling, "Mama, Mama!"

Quickly, they ran through each empty room. In the kitchen, the fire had been turned off under the stew. Mama was gone. Slamming through the screen door on the back porch, Floyd cried out, "She must be at Aunt Bertha's."

In a few bounces, he came to an abrupt halt at Aunt Bertha's back door, gulped and burst into the kitchen. Mama looked at him in wide-eyed disapproval — she'd taught him better. "Mama, Mama, Papa fell off the rig and is dead."

"Hush that kinda talk, Floyd."

His heart thumping and his thin little frame shivering, he cried, "It's true, Mama, old Henry just told us."

Aunt Bertha interrupted, "Now, Floyd, if that's a prank, it ain't funny. Don't talk to your mama thata way."

"I swear to God it's true, Aunt Bertha."

"No, no Floyd — you're lying," Mama cried.

Weeping, Lloyd said, "It's true, Mama, old Henry just told us."

With his arm around her, Floyd said, "Come on, Mama, we gotta go see about Papa."

Numbed, half running, half walking down the dusty road towards the rig, they saw the men grouped around the rig floor. The old muleskinner ran toward them shouting, "Lardy, Mrs. Bernice, God have mercy — don't you worry none now — the good Lawd, he provides...."

There he was on the rig floor, stone still. Three shivering, draped forms collapsed on the lifeless husband, father, friend and provider. Echoes of their heartache vibrated out over the dusty fields and hills. The land that had been their friend for the last two and a half years closed in on them. The horizon loomed dark and clouds were gathering.

As the last shovel full of earth fell on the grave, a red bird flew through the middle of the crowd gathered at the graveside. Floyd remembered Granny and Mama always saying, "Red bird at a funeral, good around the corner." There'd never be nothing good any more!

Seems after a funeral, you're always hungry. That's the day that the neighbors rise early and began cooking the dishes they planned the day before to bring over for the big meal. Then everyone has more than enough to eat and some asks for recipes of some special tasty dishes — and they all visit and talk about good times and laugh and joke; then they cry and say good-bye.

Later, after the preaching and the crowd and the crying and the big family meal and the sympathies, Floyd slipped off alone, unnoticed, to his favorite spot on Cole's Creek. Resting against the old leaning grandfather beech tree, he pitched pebbles in the slow moving stream. Sun perch darted at but refused each pebble.

It was in this same beech tree that he and Papa together killed the prize granddaddy squirrel in these parts. Papa guessed its weight at near four pounds. Mama musta stewed it half a day—even at that it was hard to chew, but you'd of never known it with the spoonful of gravy that was left in the bowl.

He sat there remembering and wondering till the sun was resting low, glimmering through the leaves and branches of the trees across the creek. Lost in his thoughts, he didn't hear the footfall behind him. He jumped with a start when old Henry lay his old black hand on his shoulder.

"I's sorry, boy, but I knowed you'd be right heah."

"Henry, have you ever seen someone you love—dead?"

"Lawdy, yea, yea,—sad, sad."

"Henry, what'd you do?"

Looking up at the sky, Henry said, "Well, for a spell, I jist sits and sorrows and looks up to the Heavens an' prays—an' after a whiles, the good Lawd answers. You knows, behind dem clouds, da sky is blue and da old mister sun finally starts peeping through. Sometimes da rain, he comes even with the sunshine, but the good Lawd, He ken mix dat sun an' dat rain and put a soul healing on yo'. You jist has to look up to dat sky and cast yo' sorrows beyond dem clouds. "

They both sat quiet, spellbound by the rippling stream. Henry turned to him and said in an almost reverent tone, "Yo' knows, yo' has to take care of your Mama now."

"That's what I'm gonna do, Henry — I'm gonna take care of Mama and Lloyd and me. — And Papa will be proud of me. You know, Henry, I bet Papa sent down that red bird."

"Yo' kin do it, boy, I knows yo' can do it."



Bartleby at Rest

Debbie Box

Bartleby is at rest with the kings and counselors now. And now I, his past employer and tie to life, can rest.

Seeing Bartleby drawn up next to that wall reminded me of the science drawing of a fetus in his mother. Had Bartleby retreated from the world into the womb of Mother Earth or was he shielding himself from the outside? Did he just wad himself up to be disposed of, like the dead letters that he disposed? Touching Bartleby, I realized the coldness of his dead body. The same coldness he touched everyday at work before being employed by me. It pains my heart to now know the sadness he had to contend with. The task of telling the administrator, I delegated to the grub man, giving me time to soothe Bartleby's woes of this world. Or were they mine?

The administrator of the tombs, Mr. Black, walked aimlessly to the yards. "I see that the fortunate one was Mr. Bartleby today," he sneered. "That opinion would be held by very few, I believe," said I. "I want to have Mr. Bartleby buried in a nice box with a decent ceremony."

Mr. Black laughed deeply. "A pine box is the nicest we offer and who is going to attend this service you want the state to pay for? All his loved ones that came to visit him? Better yet, who is going to come to services at the Tombs?"

I looked down at Bartleby. He had become my burden to bear and I must not drop the cross quite yet. I saw Bartleby's body muscles tightening, so I asked the administrator to help me straighten the shell of Bartleby out.

"I prefer not to, sir" he exclaimed. Shivers ran up my arm and neck, while rage flushed my face. "Mr. Bartleby preferred not to die here either. Did you help him while he was alive? Have the respect to help him now," I snapped.

As the administrator and I pulled Bartleby back into a manly form, the grub man brought news of the stretcher coming. I took my coat off and rolled it under his head. The grub man brought a tablecloth from the kitchen to cover his body from the invasion of any strange eyes. The administrator grumbled with disgust of our actions.

By the time the stretcher had taken Bartleby, I knew what had to be done. The decision to give him a funeral, with the dignity he so justly deserved, was taking shape in my mind. Many plans would have to be made and phone calls to his old office of Dead Letters to inform them of the loss and the interment plans. Ginger Nut could pass the word to colleagues as he tends to the business for the day.

Nipper and Turkey were hard at work when I returned to my office that day. Being in the late afternoon, Nipper and Turkey were busy with the work I had been detained from. Ginger Nut was not to be found. "Bartleby has passed away," I announced, "and I will prepare a proper funeral. We will take the day off and observe his passing to the table of kings and counselors."

"I would prefer not to. I would rather continue with our work that falls behind, if it pleases you," said Turkey, with not even a glance up from his table.

"I would prefer to work for money than to observe a man that would prefer not

to honor his employer's demands," quipped Nipper with a small belch and a shaking of the head.

"Your employer's wish is for all his employees to attend Bartleby's funeral," I ordered, "and pay for your attendance and grief, if that's what it takes."

Shaking my head, I proceeded with Bartleby's funeral arrangements. I could hear Bartleby, as I made each phone call and set every arrangement, mumbling "I prefer not." Well, my friend, you certainly will this time.

The hour had passed slowly and painfully when the door slammed like a fury of a tornado coming through. Ginger Nut was in a fit of temper. "People should mind their own business," he stormed. Noticing my office light on, Ginger Nut quieted down and kept his eyes toward the floor.

"Ginger Nut, come into my office," I said. He kept his eyes down as he entered.

"Sir, I beg your forgiveness for the outburst entering the office," Ginger Nut pleaded.

"Please, lad. This is a trying time for me. Do not tally. Tell me the problem," I said impatiently.

"Sir, other attorneys are saying you are crazy and neglecting your office because of this Bartleby thing," he huffed. "I liked Mr. Bartleby — and he isn't a thing. If I can do anything to help with Mr. Bartleby, I am your man. If you need donations of money, time or comfort, I will aide you if I possibly can."

"You are growing into a fine man. Your father would have been proud of you. I do prefer your help in spreading the word. Will you take care of that for me?"

"Indeed I will, sir," he said, as he sped to his table.

Returning to the deeds of putting Bartleby to rest, I finished the arrangements. Arranging his burial was easier than handling him in real life. All that nonsense of preferring not to was nerve wrecking at times for my office employees and me.

The funeral home was lonely that day. Bartleby lay in his marble coffin with his new suit on. His head on a silk pillow trimmed in small lace, he looked at peace. Or maybe I preferred him to look that way. The parlor was filled with the aromas of the flowers and newness of the coffin. The florist had arranged many bouquets upon my request. Are all the niceties of this funeral for me and my conscious? Bartleby didn't need material satisfaction to fulfill his desires.

Turkey and Nipper stayed together arguing quietly over the day's copying lost. Ginger Nut sat next to me talking about why he liked Mr. Bartleby and the future he wished had included Bartleby.

"That Mr. Bartleby loved those ginger-nuts. I bought them from the vendor two blocks over from the office. I still buy them occasionally. The smell reminds me of Mr. Bartleby and his warm voice. He was kind," Ginger Nut said with a quiver in his voice, "He had that special warmth and goodness about him."

Ginger Nut rattled on as Turkey and Nipper bickered. Surveying the room, I noticed no one else. Where is everyone? Did no one care but Ginger Nut and me.

"I sorry I is late," said the grub man as he approached me. "The administrator, he says I could come if I preferred to. I gotta be back before late to finish cleaning up

the kitchen or tomorrow I will go hungry."

"I'm glad to see you and I'm sure Mr. Bartleby would have felt honored," I said reassuring him.

The grub man approached the casket, I saw him slip something out of his coat and put it in the coffin. I approached the coffin and saw an apple and an orange. Ginger Nut came up about that time and put a small bag of ginger-nuts next to the fruit. I smiled and patted them on the back. What a group we are, a lawyer, an errand boy, and a prison cook. The only friends Bartleby had.

After the burial, we walked to the office. Not many words were spoken. The noise from the city still went on. Life went on. Business went on as though nothing had changed or happened. I prefer my life to go on as before, too. But I wondered if it could go on, with Bartleby as a reminder.

"Sir, do we go to work or do we go home?" asked Turkey, as we rounded the block of the office. I noticed then that only Nipper, Turkey, and I walked along the street. I must have been so entwined in thoughts of the day's passing that I lost track of grub man and Ginger Nut.

"Sir, do we still get paid if we go home?" asked Nipper, as he stumbled over the curb.

"No, go home! Your arguing and unconcern has been paid. Tomorrow is a new day. Be here bright and early," I demanded.

I entered my office to see what work needed to be finished before the end of the closing business day. Ginger Nut had crept in quietly, approaching my office. "I walked the grub man back to the Tombs. He was so upset," he said. "Are you going to be back with us soon, sir?"

I pondered that thought for a moment. "I have put to rest my obligations for Mr. Bartleby and his sort. I feel much better about myself now. Yes, Ginger Nut. I think I would prefer to be back with you."

Ginger Nut and I walked out of the office. We walked the two blocks and bought some warm ginger-nuts to munch on while we walked home.

We think of Bartleby from time to time. The grub man occasionally sees Ginger Nut and asks about me. My life is somewhat different. I can look at some situations and not feel obligated. I just tell them, "I prefer not."

His Father's Son

James M. Martin

Marcus leaned back lazily in the cockpit. Nothing was happening. He was in trouble again and Captain Brannon had given him observation duty as punishment, which meant he had to fly a shuttle around what Marcus termed "a boring rock of a planet."

The starship *McNair* had found this planet about a week ago. It was necessary to map all new planets on the major space routes. It was a boring job that no one really wanted. That in itself wasn't the problem, though. The Captain had demanded that he start at 0300-hours. It was now 1930-hours and Marcus was tired. There was nothing to observe but rocks and dirt. Marcus couldn't believe the Captain would saddle him with this just because he did some racing at the last starbase. Of course he had been racing Stearbase Patrol ships. It wasn't Marcus's fault. He didn't know she was the base commander's daughter.

Suddenly Marcus heard a series of beeps from his headset. He started and sat up straight. The shuttle had been cruising at five hundred feet and he was dozing off. It was Julie from the *McNair*, which was orbiting the planet.

"Talk to me, Doll-face," Marcus said stretching. Julie's face appeared on the monitor to his right, and she was frowning. This was something Marcus had noticed that communications personnel did often. It added years to Julie's face, even though she was only four months older than Marcus.

"You're mighty chipper for some one caught sleeping on the job," she said as Marcus watched her image on the screen.

"Nag, Nag, Nag . . .," Marcus said, "Don't you ever quit?" He laughed as her frown deepened. Julie stuck out her tongue, returning her face to its true age.

"The Captain's still upset with you. You always seem to make him mad," she said. "You might be out there until morning." Marcus grimaced. The Captain was fair, but hard. He wouldn't hesitate to leave Marcus out mapping the surface with his on-board computer.

"Does this mean we're not on for tonight?" he asked. Marcus raised his eyebrows.

"I doubt you'll have any free time for the next couple of weeks, Hot Shot," Julie replied sarcastically. "Anyway, why don't you ask Commander Vaden's daughter?" Marcus rolled his eyes heavenward. Not again.

"I told you I didn't know she was his daughter!" His radar screen blipped spasmodically. He gazed at, but it had returned to normal.

"Sure you didn't." Julie replied. Suddenly, her frown popped back into place.

"What's wrong?" Marcus asked. Julie was busy at her terminal. Her eyes were vague as she listened to information from her headset. Something was going on.

"What's happening?" Marcus asked again. She held up her hand as a signal for him to wait, then returned back to him.

"Trouble at the science station," Julie said, "over on the far side of the planet."

"Trouble?"

"They're under attack."

"By who?"

"Can't tell. Most of their computers are knocked out. We barely got the S.O.S." Marcus switched to manual control.

"Tell them I'm on my way," he said, flipping down the visor on his helmet and kicking the engines to full throttle.

"Are you crazy? You're not in your fighter; you'll be killed!"

"Then you'll have dinner alone," Marcus replied. He switched to a serious tone as he plotted a course to the station. "I have to do something," Marcus argued. Sure, he was in a shuttle. It was bigger and slower than his fighter-ship, but he couldn't sit on his hands. Besides most of the other fighter pilot's ships were having the computer upgrades changed. A routine procedure but it took time, so none of them would be able to down link and get all the way over to that side of the planet for at least forty-five minutes. In that length of time all the people at the science station could be dead.

"Just wait for backup." He could see the worried look on her face. She hated times like this.

"Those people can't wait. I have to go," Marcus persisted. The shuttle rocketed toward the station. He glanced at Julie. "I'll be okay, just get those guys down here quick." She still looked worried; Marcus wasn't sure about that himself.

"Be careful," Julie said finally and the monitor went blank. Marcus checked his ETA: five minutes. The monitor popped back on. This time it wasn't Julie: it was Commander Garvin.

"Hunter, turn that ship around and wait for a fighter team. That's an order," he snarled. Marcus considered this request briefly.

"Sorry, Commander, the signal's breaking up, I can't hear you!" he said and turned the monitor off. As he approached the station, smoke billowed up into the sky. The scene was bad.

Two ships roared past. Marcus had to fight to control the shuttle. Another ship approached, a black fighter that Marcus couldn't place. They were smaller and faster, but a shuttle could withstand enough hits to escape. He hoped. Marcus spoke into his microphone and using the external speaker called out to any survivors. He hovered four feet above the ground and opened the port side hatch. If he landed they were all toast. Several people clambered aboard, but Marcus couldn't get a look at them since he had to watch for the attacking ships. There was a loud jarring boom and the shuttle was knocked to one side.

"Everybody in?" Marcus shouted toward the back.

"Yeah, Go!" came a reply. Marcus closed the hatch, gunned the engines and headed back the way he had come. The shuttle suffered several hits but Marcus was able to pilot it to the cover of a nearby canyon. They were protected from laser-fire but the fighters didn't turn away until after what seemed like an eternity. A young man of nearly thirty, with dark hair and tired eyes came forward.

"That was great flying. Thanks."

"No problem," Marcus replied as he headed for the McNair.

The next morning in the Captain's office Marcus was upset about the events of the previous night, and he was not a happy man.

"So you disobeyed direct orders and engaged an unknown hostile force." Marcus wondered if he was upset or worried.

"Yes, Sir," he replied.

"But you saved the science team."

"Yes, Sir."

The Captain stared Marcus down. It was a calculating, menacing stare. "It seems the ends justifies the means," the Captain said, pausing before adding, "this time."

Marcus fought off a smile as he thought, my luck is finally changing.

"But you're still under official reprimand." Then again maybe not, Marcus thought.

"Dismissed, Lieutenant Hunter." Marcus turned and walked toward the door. Short and to the point, like every time.

"Just a minute," the Captain said. Marcus turned around. The Captain was looking out the window behind the desk, not at Marcus.

"Good work, son," he said without emotion.

"Thanks, Dad," Marcus said as he exited the Captain's office.

The Unexpected Guest

Cynthia Reed

Renee Calcote was a twenty-seven year old woman who was recovering from a painful divorce ending an eight year marriage. As she drove down the narrow, rutted, dirt road, she felt relief that she could start her new life in a new place.

From day one of her marriage, she had wanted to find a house in the Kelvin Mountains of Minnesota. Only now after her divorce did she find the beautiful home and real estate there. She decided that this would be the perfect setting to begin the writing career that had been put on hold during the marriage. The Baileys seemed very anxious to sell. She had gotten a very good buy. They actually sold the house for half of what it was worth. Surprisingly, they had already packed and moved out before they closed the deal with her. Their hastiness made her a little uneasy, but she quickly dismissed that thought and decided that they were just as anxious to move into their new home as she was.

She stopped at an old store in a small, secluded village called Braxton, to buy food and supplies. As she walked in, she noticed that a tall, slender, elderly man was watching her every move.

"Aren't you the lady who's moving into the Bailey house," he curiously asked.

Hesitating for only an instant, she quickly replied, "Yes, I'm just on my way there to get a few of my things settled in. I'm really anxious to get moved."

"Well, Missy, I'm not trying to scare you, but I don't think you should be in those mountains alone. There are things in those mountains that people can't explain; well . . . animals I mean," he said.

In reply she said, "A little wildlife doesn't bother me. I'm not scared of wolves or wildcats. Besides, I have a rifle in my car."

"I'm not talking about wolves or wildcats, missy; there are supposedly other things," he said. She took her supplies and headed for the door, not paying any attention to his eerie warning.

The drive to the house seemed endless, partly because she was so anxious to get there, and because the scenery never changed through-out the drive. It began to rain, and once she reached the house, she quickly unloaded the boxes. She was walking up the steps of the porch when she noticed some strange footprints in soft, red clay. Carefully, she studied them. The prints resembled human prints except they were very large and only had four toes. As she examined the prints she remembered what the old man had said, but then quickly dismissed that. After all, she had her rifle and she really wasn't afraid of animals. Besides, the rain could have easily altered the prints making them appear to be something they weren't. She continued onto the porch, and unlocked the door. Reaching in, she flipped on the light switch. There was no response. "Hmm, that's strange," she thought, "the power should have been on by now." She never did like the darkness, but the weather was definitely too bad for the long drive back to her apartment. This bothered her, but she decided that she could survive without electricity for one night.

She dug into the boxes and found a small, half-used candle. After lighting it, she

carefully made her way to the door at the end of the hall. The candle's faint glow barely lighted the room enough to make a difference in the darkness. She couldn't see well enough to know what was in the room but managed to make a makeshift bed and collapse onto it. The loud, echoing thunder distracted her, but the tapping of the rain on the roof eventually lulled her into a fitful sleep.

Suddenly, a clap of loud thunder brought her quickly out of her light sleep into full awareness. About to reach for the light, she suddenly remembered, "No power."

A strange sound caught her attention. It sounded as if someone or something was trying to enter the house from the outside. She could see nothing, not even her hand in front of her face. The lightning then flashed and she thought she saw a large, distorted figure peering in at her window. In an instant another flash came and nothing was there. She strained her eyes and ears just waiting to see or hear anything at all. She could feel her body uncontrollably shaking. She was trying to dismiss it as imagination, but knew that what she saw was just as real as she was. Panic seized her trembling body. A chill ran up her spine. She feared the gruesome figure lurking in the darkness outside her window.

Terror ran throughout her heart when she suddenly remembered that she had forgotten to lock the front door. Instinct caused her to grab the rifle beside her as she leaped to her feet praying she could reach the front door before it did. She ran down the long, dark, unfamiliar hall as quickly as possible. It was too late! The door was banging back and forth with powerful breezes rushing in. In panic she ran back the way she had come expecting something to step out of the deep shadows. Although her feet were flying, she felt as if she were being held back by an unknown force. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest, threatening to rupture at any moment. She reached her room and found her way to the corner and slid down the wall cradling herself like a baby, embracing the rifle against her chest.

Her fear increased, for she could hear the sound of heavy feet slowly but surely making their way closer to her. She could feel sweat streaming down her warm, scared face.

Lightning flashed; she could see a shadow under the crack of the door. "I should have listened to the old man. It's going to get me!" The latch of the door clicked, followed by the creaking sound of the door's rusted hinges moving in her direction. She heard its labored breathing! The lightning flashed again, providing her with enough light to aim and shoot at the shadowy moving figure in front of her. The next sound was that of something large crumpling to the floor.

She was shaking uncontrollably and tears streamed from her eyes. She listened as the creature's gasping breaths slowly came to a halt. Paralyzed with fear she was unable to move and remained cowering in the corner till morning.

A hushed quietness fell upon the previous night's scene. Renee gathered

"Perhaps it was a dream," she prayed.

Now the early grayness sent its first dim light into the room. Tears streamed from her eyes as she saw the bloody, crumpled body of her ex-husband on the floor. In his outstretched hand was a single red rose.



All That Glitters...

Kay Kay Smith

Obsessive. That is definitely what it had become. I think when it shimmers, it is mocking me, laughing at me. Every day I go to the pit and watch it shimmer and glitter. I reach and reach, but it is of no use; I still can't reach it.

The sides of the pit were solid rock, twelve feet high, shaped and smoothed for years by the running water of a once-beautiful waterfall. The river that had fed the waterfall had gone dry many years before. If it were not for those sides, I could reach the gold ring that was now part of my life and dreams. But if I were to slide down those sides, I could never get out. They just weren't close enough for me to brace my feet on to inch my way up and out. If I asked for help, I would have to share the wealth the gold ring was sure to bring me. I had gone over the facts at least a million times.

After my two-hour drive home, I lay in bed and thought about my riches to come. How long had that gold ring been down there? When the water was still running into the fall, it was supposedly a great vacation spot for the wealthy. That is what brought me to the secluded spot in the first place. I wanted to build a fancy resort and supply water so the fall would be once again beautiful. Now I would have not need to invest money into a silly dream like that. I had my ring.

I could actually feel the weight of the gold ring in my hand. I would take it to an old jeweler I knew in town.

"My, my! How exquisite! Where on earth did you find such a valuable ring" he would ask in an awed voice.

I would relate my tale of everlasting patience and long suffering in planning my rescue of it. I would tell him of the probable millionaire who carelessly let the ring slip off her delicate finger.

Slowly I drifted off to sleep with a smile on my face. I dreamed only of fantasies of money and happiness. I lived on Park Avenue and owed a Rolls Royce in the dream. Beautiful girls adored me.

With this dream in mind the next morning, I drove the two hours to the pit quickly. Today was the day. Wealth awaited me.

I lay on my belly and extended my arms toward my beloved ring. The ominous sky glared at me as I held my breath and tried to reach the ring with a stick. If I could reach the ring with a stick, I could carefully slide it up the side and into my clutches.

Suddenly aware of an odd sensation, I was sliding down into the pit! I had reached just an inch too far. I screamed wildly when I reached the bottom. I knew the closest house was two houses away and it was mine. It was of no use.

I then remembered the sole reason I was down there. My gold ring! I searched frantically for it. As I picked up the torn gold paper of a roll of Certs, I leaned against the smooth side, accepted my fate, and cried.

Poetry

Bonds

Carolyn Rudder

*Funny old wrinkled face
Eyes that twinkle at your sight
Outstretched hands that tell a tale
Welcome hug – no pretense*

*Words exchanged that neither can understand;
Gestures and smiles convey their language,
“Popop, can I ride old Dan?”*

*Grabbing his old battered felt hat – hand in hand–
Young and old – walk out the door.*

*At the barnyard fence, Dan stretches his neck eagerly
towards his old master’s hand.
His head slips through the worn reins
not so much in obedience, but in greeting a loving companion.
Soft hands rub his old smelly hide,
Coarse wrinkled hands throw the blanket on first,
then the tattered saddle.*

*“Whoa, Dan, whoa, steady now.”
Leaning over, he cupped his hands and motioned, her tiny foot
barely covering his hands as he gently hoisted her up.*

*Sitting high in the saddle and tightly holding onto the
saddle horn, she pretended she was older and running free
in the wind–just her and Dan.*

*Her grandpa walked them up and down the gravel driveway
remembering when he was a young man riding high in the
saddle
against the wind–just him and Dan.*

Honorable Mention

MCCCWA

The One He Forgot to Listen to

De'Ana Lee

You told me so many times
so many things,
and a moment ago, I believed you
on my own.
Again you were right; never
leading me astray.
I've seen so much of you in me
over the years.
Perhaps I'm just a greatly magnified
version of you,
being slowly molded by life
to become me.
Over and over, I fall in love with
the music of your youth.
My friends play it on their guitars,
so did you.
I feel like the person you had
reason to be,
yet the turmoil that haunts your life
has never touched mine.
Did it transfer from your
veins into mine?
One day I may uphold the ideals
important to you.
We both know that day doesn't come
without harsh experience.
If I fail you today,
keep this paper.
Know that I see you were there
trying to lead me,
but your stubborn little girl must always
take the new path.
It's not possible to understand
everything I do.
How many times do I say
that to myself?
I don't make promises
I won't keep.
I do promise I love you
and always will.

Heartfelt

Carolyn Rudder

Motor rumbling—exhaust talking
Up the gravel driveway rambles a large yellow Dodge—
Rusted and battered—almost past retirement.
But it gives wheels to smiling faces,
Some with half-rotten teeth—the others gleaming.

**“Hey, we thought we’d stop by and say hello.
How y’all been doing?”**

Three little heads in the back seat
stretch for a better view.

**“Remember when we went squirrel hunting
and you took that picture of me?”**

Neglect showing on all their faces.

**“Yea, we remember, had a great time didn’t we, Jamie?”
“We haven’t seen you in a long time.”**

Raised by his grandma, tenderhearted, loving—
life hit him hard from the beginning—
his daddy, a drunk—his mama, terminally ill.

**“No, I’m not married to her, but I’m thinking about it.
Yea, this is her three kids...”**

In an adult world—still just a kid himself.

**“I know, my first one didn’t work out.
No, I haven’t dranked too much to drive—
Yea, I know it’s not good for me.”**

Smells of strong drink with every breath.

**“I had me a job—but I’m not working now.
Do you think you can loan me ten dollars—
five will do.”**

Generations—

Always helped by caring people not wanting
to get their hands too dirty.

Temperamental Friend

Jill Fuller

He presses against my window
Always expecting an answer.
In the heat of the summer
I welcome him in.
He moves through the house
Bringing comfort and satisfaction,
But I soon close the door
Shutting him out.
He knocks once, twice, and once again.
Soon he settles down,
But only for a spell.
When the storm clouds roll in,
He quickly becomes the enemy.
So eager to destroy.
As he moves outside the house,
He battles with many obstacles.
Many he defeats as they fall to the ground.
At the end of the storm
His contentment overwhelms him.
Then he quickly settles down
And admires the damage he has done.
Soon he will again come back
As an enemy or our friend
But we will always refer to him as
The wind.

God Lives

Micki Freels

To those of you who say God's not alive
That birth is birth and death is death, that's all
There is no fiery Hell or Judgement Hall
You say we're born only that we may die.
To those of you who see no angels fly
Nor feel the brush of Death before it calls
For there around your soul, you've built a wall
Where ignorance turns Truth into blind lies.
To you, I say, you've never seen the sun
Or really felt the tender passing breeze.
Are their journeys spent? Have they just begun?
The one who knows not Christ does not believe
That God's kingdom's come, that His will's been done
Therefore knows not his own eternity!

A Mother's Sacrifice

Micki Freels

Lay your head down in my arms, little child
While I tenderly wipe away your tears
Fate has brought us together for a while
There for each other as the time draws near,
Instilling comfort and hope where there's fear.
You shall go your way and I shall go mine
Both of us list'ning to what angels hear
Sharing a love not forgotten in time
That men search a lifetime, never to find.
My heart, torn with sorrow, must let you go
Destiny leads us, we follow behind,
Knowing in our hearts it will take us Home.
Go, little child, to the angels on high
God takes to Heaven all children who die.

Rights Of Creation

Micki Freels

*And the sun and the moon, created He
For to bring life to the day and the night.
He made Heaven and earth, both land and sea
The fruit of the vine and Neptune's delight;
All this God made beautiful in His sight.
There was peace in the world that He had made
Void of the struggle between wrong and right
As the cherubs, in their innocence, played
And all of creation, to Heaven prayed.
The birds sailed the horizon without fear
Only fish swam under the ocean waves
And Hell was a dark, empty atmosphere.
All beauty God created by His hand
Not meant to be destroyed by greed of man.*

Death's Touch

Micki Freels

*I loved someone like no one in this world
He was my always love, so pure and true
A different love from that of little girls
He took my heart and then to Heaven flew.
His hair was dark and coarse, just like a man
His eyes, they still burn deep within my soul
I reached out once and took him by the hand
Hoping my love was what would make him whole.
He took my heart and turned it upside down
He took my soul and turned it inside out
Such tragic tears are now my only sound
As grievance, pain and sorrow dance about.
A mighty wail to God when Death is done
Will not rejoin a mother with her son.*

Poet's Inspiration

Micki Freels

To the Muses, I will drink of their drink.
Yes, to the Muses I will write a song!
And they in turn shall cause my heart to think
For it is to the Muses I belong.
If they say write of the moon and the stars
Then once upon the heavens I shall gaze.
Yes, pure poetry the Muses are;
I am their actress, all the world, my stage.
I hear their voices whispering my name.
My heart is theirs, for the soul they gave me.
I long to be from where the Muses came
I write when touched by their divinity.
For Poetry is what the heart is taught
To tell the world the messages of God.

Innocence

Micki Freels

She dances to the tune of Laura's song
Pir'ouetting as light sparkles in her hair
A dove of innocence, still pure and fair
Touched not by life's reality of wrong.
She's lost where only fairies still belong
Captive to a time; once we all were there
Where angels dance upon the misty air
And hearts and wind flow merrily along.
Innocence does come from celestial grace
Purity from the touch of angel's hands.
Dance on, my pretty, to praise Heaven's place
Dance on the beauty of eternal sands.
Then shall God behold your innocent face
Remem'bring once again His love for man.

Honorable Mention
MCCCWA

Flight One

Jill Fuller

*To soar above the trees, the public, the waters;
What it must be like
To feel the control of a feathered one with all his form,
To dare your first powerful adventure in the skies.
What it must be like to fly,
To test skills with great assurance.
The expectations of those who gaze into the baby blues
Heavy on the shoulders of your flight suit.
The fear that matters no more still filling the cockpit.
The first flight of your life closing in on you
As you receive the "all clear" signal from the tower.
The enormous bird belongs to you,
And you now belong to him.
To you and your wings, I wish you good luck.
Fly with control, but fly with faith
Faith in God, faith in your excellent skills, and
Faith in the big green bird that holds your future.*

Lament of a Non-poet

Michael Russell

I want to say something beautiful
or exciting or maybe even grand,
unfortunately I do not know how.
My thoughts lack words to save their grace,
and my pencil does not stir
across the parched emptiness of the page.

For some, symmetry and rhyme flow like a mighty river,
roaring feelings and spraying thoughts.
But I am a meager brook, babbling, complaining
trying to breach my shores,
fighting to write something
to transcend what I am,
to transform the world.

In my hands a pencil is only a tool,
limited by my concrete boundaries,
defined as jagged rocky banks.

So I pray for a storm of feeling,
the rain of introspective sorrow,
the lashing of wind of pain or joy
to swell my brook of feeling
into that overflowing of emotion
poets harness to work the gristmill of their souls.

But I am not a mighty river,
I am a tiny rivulet, choppy and dismayed
that poetry is beyond my mind.
But ever will I struggle, seeping across a page
to become a mighty river
and make poetry that outlasts my days.

Ample Cerebral Tension

Matthew Calhoun

Lead flies,
Papers smoke,
Brains fail,
Just don't say,
"Times up."
The pressure mounts,
The pencils break,
The clock ticks.
Worried expressions
Everywhere.
The chair hurts,
Cramps in the hand
grow more and more
painful.
The end is in sight!
Almost there,
Almost there...
"Time's up!"
Put your pencils down."
Oh, well.
You'll get it next time. Besides, a
16 isn't that bad,
right?



Willie Harrell

Silent Redeemer

Kay Kay Smith

*He is everywhere and knows all.
No, He is not God.
For this being is not merciful;
This being rips out my soul
And takes pleasure in my
Pain.*

*He lies in wait to
Pilfer my dreams at night.
He lurks in every shadow
That I see all day.
He has caused grievance on my
Heart.*

*He preys on the guilty so
His bony hand has a
Strong hold on my heart.
I say a quick prayer of repentance
And my conscience is once again
Silent.*

Hope For Tomorrow

Lonnie Boyd

*Little kids on the playground
With hearts so full of joy
Minds of our tomorrow
Have not a care in the world.
Playing in the sand
Sliding down the slide*

*Listening to moms say no
But do it anyway.
Watching them play
Makes me feel like a kid again
Watching them from a window sill
Watching the hope for tomorrow.*



Non-Fiction

THE CONTROLLING FACTOR: WHO REALLY POSSESSES IT?

Kathy Odom

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, "The Artist of the Beautiful" takes an assortment of characters and uses them to demonstrate how they, like our present generation, fall into one of these categories: controlling, being controlled, or hanging in the balance - with it tipping neither one way nor the other. As their lives intertwine with each other they display their attitudes and positions of authority or their lack of it.

Peter Hovenden is in a controlling position although his physical attributes would seem to deny this. He is an elderly man, who has lost his health and the "nicety of his eyesight" and is "fit for nothing else." Because Owen has these qualities that he has lost, he is jealous and feels even more animosity toward Owen than the normal vexation he suffers from Owen's ingenious. He is a cold realist and he holds nothing but mockery and scorn for anything other than the practical. He possesses a "cold, unimaginative sagacity, by contact with which everything was converted into a dream except the densest matter of the physical world." Domineering and authoritative over Owen, Hovenden tries to stifle Owen's creativity that goes so against his grain. He is influential in his daughter Annie's life, making nothing but derogatory remarks concerning Owen while on the other hand praising the wholesomeness of Danforth's priorities and profession. Even through heredity, he plays a potent role in controlling his grandson.

All the characters control and influence Owen Warland, the extreme ideological opposite of Hovenden. Owen, the dreamer/romantic, is a very sensitive individual who suffers emotional extremes. Hawthorne emphasizes Owen's physical attributes and subservient role he plays: "Seated within the shop, sidelong to the window, with his pale face bent earnestly over some delicate piece of mechanism...the character of Owen's mind was microscopic, and tended naturally to the minute, in accordance with his diminutive frame and the marvelous smallness and delicate power of his fingers." Owen lets his dreams and ambitions be squashed by the unfeeling remarks and actions of Hovenden, and deters from his quest for creating the beautiful. However, in the end, when the product of his dreams and labor is physically crushed, he is not tormented by it. The artist has accomplished his goal and is triumphant, while the others are dismayed at the destruction of the physical object - the reality.

However, Owen suffers at the hand of Annie's influence. She is described as Hovenden's "pretty daughter," and Owen falls victim to his own deceptions about her:

He had persisted in connecting all his dreams of artistic success with Annie's image; she was the visible shape in which the spiritual power that he worshipped, and on whose altar he hoped

to lay a not unworthy offering, was made manifest in him. Of course he had deceived himself; there were no such attributes in Annie Hovenden as his imagination had endowed her with.

He temporarily abandons his pursuit of the beautiful because of her influence, more specifically from the disappointment he endures when his attempt to gain her "sympathy and thought" backfires. At the same time that Annie is influencing Owen, she is influenced and intrigued by him. Perhaps she has just a hint of the artist's spirit, and this is what he strives to reach, but without success. She does not have the cold, harsh attitude of her father, and she tries — although without luck — to soften his views toward Owen. Her father, because of not only his dominant spirit but also his place of ascendancy, more than likely aids in her decision to marry Robert Danforth. Whatever trace of the artist spirit she has acquiesces when her father speaks to his impressionable daughter, and she chooses Danforth as her future husband.

Robert Danforth, the prime choice of Hovenden as son-in-law, imposes an influential power over Owen. He is a very practical person, devoting his strength and energies to things that have a practical purpose to them. Danforth contrasts with Owen in both physical qualities

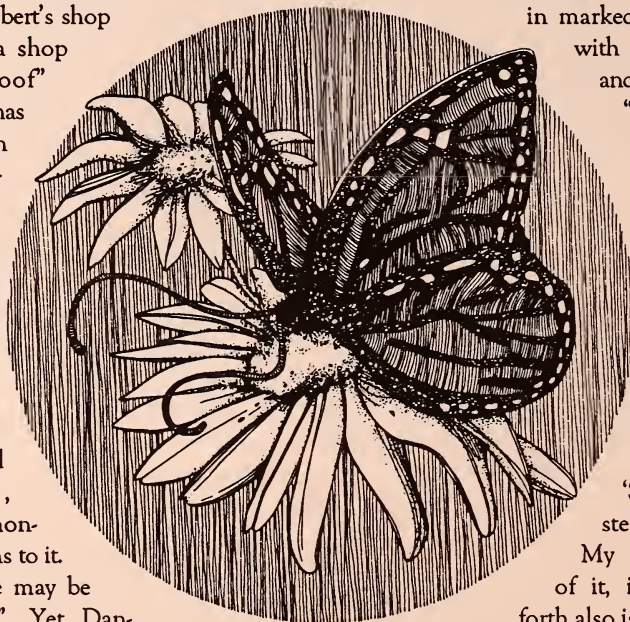
and ideology. Hawthorne describes Robert's shop

Owen's; a shop
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lungs...in
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speaks in
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spiritual." Yet, Dan-
press Owen's endeavors, and
"would drive me mad were I to meet him often. His hard, brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me...."



in marked contrast to
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Owen readily admits that Danforth

and confuses the spiritual element within me...."

The child of Robert and Annie fulfills a dual role in the story. Even though he is a child and assumedly innocent, he possesses the traits of his domineering grandfather in addition to the genes of his father and mother. Hawthorne introduces

him as a "child of strength...something so sturdy and real in his composition." Furthermore, he is called a "hopeful infant...with a look of such sagacious observation," one that Owen compares to "Hovenden's habitual expression" and even fancies "that the old watchmaker was compressed into this baby shape, and looking out of those baby eyes...." Even the butterfly detected "something not entirely congenial in the child's nature," and it is through the strength of the child that the creation of the artist is destroyed.

Hawthorne uses irony in the last scene when the child crushes and destroys the butterfly. The one that we would typically expect to be the most upset, the creator of the beautiful, is the only calm one in the group. The one who has set his goal on a spiritual thing and has accomplished it is not taken aback by the destruction of "the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses." In contrast, the practicalist's reaction to the ruination of the material include: Annie's screams, Old Peter's scornful laughs, and the blacksmith, "by main force," prying open the hand of the innocent child. Or is the child so imbued with the traits of his oppressive grandfather that he is not innocent at all - and after all is said and done - who is really in control?

Teen Fathers: The Other Side of the Story

Melanie Moak

You probably know teen pregnancy is one of the main issues facing our nation today. When people discuss teen pregnancy you usually only hear one side of the story, the mothers. The stories you hear are usually ones of disaster. They go something like this: the boy leaves the girl alone, or he denies the child is his, or they get married and divorced within a year or so. These are the every day typical situations you hear about when teen pregnancy is being discussed. Believe me, there is another side to the story. The side I would like to discuss is the one where the teen father is recognized.

Teen fathers who stay with their partner and try to make a life for them and their children are an elite group. These are the ones who, like the girl, give up their freedom to become a spouse and a parent. Surprisingly, most of the ones who stay do this because they want to, not because they have to. You know, there is such a thing as love in even the worst of times. Society never sees this side of the story; of course, society probably isn't looking for the good side to a bad story.

Becoming a father is an emotional time for all men, but can you imagine being a mere child and becoming a father. Michael Penetti, author of *Coping with School Age Fathers* says, "The time between conception and birth is full of passion, tough decisions, tension, changes in loyalty, and heightened emotions." I guess this is a little much for the average teen male to handle. That is why so many leave, because they can't handle the pressure. Notice, I said this is too much for the average male to handle. In my opinion, the ones who stay through thick and thin are not anywhere near average. Those who leave, on the other hand, are much less than average.

An article in the Fort Collins, Colorado, newspaper stated some facts on teen fathers. It states that society has a real double standard when it comes to teen fathers. Society believes the fathers shouldn't have to be involved. Most people even believe it is really the girl's responsibility. The article also makes some other really good points about the teen father's role in his child's life. The author emphasizes the necessity of a father figure for all children. Having a father involved is a plus for any child no matter the age of the father. One person can't give a child all it needs. Barbara Loy, director of a teen-mother program in Fort Collins, noted that only fourteen mothers out of fifty in her group were married. Loy stated,

Not many guys will commit to the girls. Marriage is not as important in these situations as it used to be. Nothing is more difficult than making a marriage work. It is the hardest job anyone has. Most young men would like to be good fathers, they just don't know how. (7-8)

There is such a thing as a happy ending for married teens. Some teen parents planned to get married sooner or later anyway. Sure, three out of five teen marriages do not work, but does that mean they shouldn't even try to make a go of it. Isn't it worth

it to the child who has been created to try to be a family? If for some reason it doesn't work, you can always say you tried your best.

I know a guy who had been dating his girlfriend for fourteen months when she found out she was pregnant. They had planned to get married two years later when they were in college, and both had jobs. After she got the news, they talked it over and decided to get married. Two weeks later they made their vows, intending to keep them forever. Everyone said they had to get married. No one has to get married, except on soap operas. They didn't have much money because he was still in school and could only work in the afternoons. The couple decided to live with her father until the baby was born. She managed to get a part time job to help make some extra money.

She experienced many problems during the pregnancy. One day in May, about seven months after the wedding, the doctor put her in the hospital. Her blood pressure was high and toxemia had developed. It was time for them to meet their child. Through nine hours of unsuccessful labor her husband nervously coached and comforted. Finally, the doctor decided an emergency Caesarean section had to be done.

The baby's heart rate was unstable, and any more stress from labor could be dangerous. Since his wife had had an epidural she could remain awake during the surgery and he could go in with her. He calmly watched the entire surgery, all the time whispering words of comfort in his scared child-like wife's ear. This would be too much for some thirty-year-old men to handle, but this once boy, now man, was a rock through the whole ordeal.

Knowing his wife was in much pain and couldn't take care of the baby very well, he jumped head first into the bottles and diaper routine. He awoke with the baby at night for many months. There were countless nights when the baby never went to sleep, but he stayed awake rocking and coaxing his son. During the day, he worked even after being up so many times at night. Never once did he complain about his duties or responsibilities. For the next eighteen months he would serve as provider, father, playmate, house-husband, and counselor. These are many roles for an eighteen-year-old to play. Most eighteen-year-olds can barely take care of themselves much less a wife and a sickly child. Through every doctor's visit he was there, through every sleepless night he was there, through every disappointment he was there.

I believe an effort like this should be recognized and commended. I have heard his mother say on many occasions how proud she is of him. She says, "There aren't many like him, not even his father." I know she is telling the truth because the man I have just described to you is my husband, my rock, my friend, and I am the proudest wife in the world.

Many young men think it's cute to love them and leave them. These are sadly mistaken. I have seen teen fathers out playing with their children and that is what's really cute. I know from experience how hard being a child and raising a child can be. I believe that if you don't feel you can raise a child, don't take the chance on having one. My husband has never complained, but I know sometimes he feels like his life has been taken away from him. He wants to do things he enjoys and can't because he has to work. The financial pressures are tremendous, and the burden of responsibility

overwhelming when you are married with a family and trying to get an education. Only a few teen fathers can survive. I guess that is why so many girls are left to face these pressures alone, yet no one should have to face such an ordeal alone. No matter how tough the pressures, there is a great reward in raising your child to be the person you would like him to be. The reward you receive for this is worth the struggle. No father should want or have to miss this reward, whether he is fourteen or forty.

The NBC local nightly news at ten has run a special three-part series this week on teen fathers. They have talked mostly about child support and those fathers who leave their partner. I will always remember one statement they have made continuously in this presentation. It should send out a message to everyone especially teen fathers who do not plan on seeing their situation through. It is one of those statements that shouts truth to all. The statement is, "Boys make babies, men are fathers." My question is which are you, or which do you want to be?

"Big Buck" Jordan

Ronnie Haley

It is the year of my fourteenth birthday, I have long awaited this day for I will now have the chance, not only to hunt with the men, but also to meet this man the deer hunters call "Big Buck." I've many times listened to my father tell fascinating stories of the long day's hunt for magnificent whitetail deer, intriguing me more though were the detailed descriptions of "Big Buck" Jordan.

Winter has set in, and on this particular morning I've jumped out of bed with a tremendous amount of energy. I glance out the window to find the sun is trying to pierce the wintery clouds with its rays of warmth. There is a heavy blanket of frost on the ground, and I know it won't be long before the first snowflakes will begin to fall. Father never says so, but I think he is as anxious as I to build Mr. Snowman and to have our annual snowball fight.

Mother is insistent, despite my constant complaining, of the clothes I need to wear. Insulated rubber boots, a wool scarf which she knitted especially for me, mittens, and ear muffs to keep my ears from freezing and falling off. Last but surely not least, a warm kiss on the nose and a pinch on the cheek.

Father and I load the truck with all the essentials needed for the weekend stay at the hunting camp: boxes and boxes of bullets, for father has a reputation for missing his target, two very old rifles which have been handed down through the generations, and of course, my gun, which father has purchased second hand at the local pawn shop. Mother has fixed a brown bag full of sandwiches and fruit for the trip, and a countless number of nik-naks that will surely come in handy during our stay. Satisfied everything is packed away we set out for the long drive to the camp.

I know father is exhausted when we arrive, not only from the long drive, but also from the endless questioning about "Big Buck." My eagerness has engulfed me so that I bound out of the truck as soon as it comes to a halt. There is smoke bellowing out of the chimney, and the sweet smell of burning oak has filled the air; I know instantly who is in the cabin.

As I walk toward the cabin, oblivious to my surroundings, my mind is filled with past descriptions as I try to envision what he might look like. Is he 7 feet tall? Does he really resemble a Grizzly Bear? Or is he a small man of stature with beady little eyes? Well, I am sure to find out and not a moment too soon. I open the door slowly hoping to sneak a quick look at Buck before he has a chance to see me; but the old rusty hinges give away my existence, for they have long since been oiled properly. The monstrous door constructed of aged heart pine is too heavy for the old hinges and makes a grating sound as it scrapes another layer of wood off the hardwood floor.

Buck, I assume, being accustomed to these familiar sounds never turns around, but rather keeps his mind on the ongoing task of having breakfast ready for the men.

I tiptoe across the floor keeping an ever watchful eye on Buck for I only know him from past stories.

He is not as I had expected, for he is a man of average height, guessing maybe

five foot 8 inches tall. He has a small head covered only by a few aging gray hairs. His back is slightly bent over from age, and I suppose cooking over a hot stove for so many years has lent its hand in causing this damage to his body. When he does turn around I can see his skin is brown and tough as sun cured leather. His eyes display a hardness obtained throughout the years, and yet show a passion for love and life itself without ever being afraid of the day when the Lord will call his name. For it is well known his love ran deep in his soul for his late wife Martha, and that he would often exclaim that he would soon join her never to part again.

Buck sets an enormous breakfast before me consisting of fresh hickory smoked slabs of ham, three freshly laid yard eggs, for he says he wouldn't hear of putting a store-bought egg in his skillet; creamy, golden grits, and some of the biggest cathead biscuits smothered in butter I'd ever laid eyes on. To wash this all down, a tall glass of fresh milk taken straight from that contrary old milk cow he calls Jenny.

Enjoying this delicious meal I feel like a bear after feasting on a honey nest and feeling the desire to lie down, I do: on an old cloth covered couch donated by one of the men. After the men ate and left for the morning hunt, I stayed behind. Buck and I talked for what seemed like hours. It came to my knowledge of how he obtained the name "Big Buck." Not having anything to do with his size, but years before he had bagged the biggest whitetail in that area and no one had beaten his record since. I have decided to stay with Buck for most of the hunting season, father never truly understanding why; and gaining such a comradery relationship between us, that neither of us wanting to say good-bye when the time has come to leave.

When that time does arrive we say our good-byes with much regret, and yet with a tranquility of knowing, or with immense hope of seeing each other next year.

Now spring has come with all its liveliness, but is shadowed greatly when I learn of Buck's death. He has told me of his wish to be called to heaven at this time of year, for it is a time of new beginning, all of God's nature coming forth as new life. This seems to ease the pain for I know within that Buck hasn't died after all, but for him it is a new beginning.

Beneath It All

Shelley Herrington

Everyone at Jefferson High School remembers Lynell - with his bushy afro hair and his full mustache. When he smiled his teeth would gleam in contrast to his black skin. He was always working - cleaning, repairing, or doing whatever need to be done. Lynell was our school janitor. Some people might look upon this as a life wasted in a lowly position, but somehow Lynell seemed to make a difference in the lives of everyone who knew him.

No task was too large or too menial for Lynell. He did whatever was asked of him (whether it was a part of his job description or not) and beneath it all was this overwhelming sense of pride in doing his best.

Teachers knew that if there was some project that they needed extra help with, Lynell would gladly assist. He helped repair the roof on the concession stand at the football field. He carried chairs and set them up for the band concert. He repainted the picture of the school mascot in the gym. He blew up balloons for the Valentine's party. He also hung streamers for the prom. He was always doing something above and beyond his normal duties. For this the teachers loved him. That was why whenever a class held a party at school, Lynell always received a special invitation. They also made sure that there would be plenty of refreshments saved for Lynell.

Though he had many tasks, he was never too busy for the students. He would manage to take his breaks at the same time we had our breaks. He would be sitting on the school steps as though he was waiting for us. He would always smile and talk. Lynell seemed to love the students. At our school it was "cool" to hang out with Lynell. We liked him because he was always doing things for us. He would retrieve items for us that we had left on the bus in the morning. He could always be counted on to locate things that we had lost on campus such as books or jackets. And best of all, Lynell could be talked into running to town to pick up things for us. We would send him to get gum, candy, chips, and all sorts of junk food. One of the most popular items that Lynell would bring us from town was "red hots," cinnamon flavored toothpicks that the kids liked to put in their mouths to suck on. Of course, he would teasingly scold us for not eating in the school cafeteria where the ladies had worked so hard to prepare a hot, nutritious meal for us.

Mrs. Turner was our guidance counselor, an ancient relic, very prim and proper. She would counsel students by seating them across from her desk and lecturing to them as she peered over her glasses. Mrs. Turner often had to deal with students who were "misfits," or rebels who would not conform to the rules. Lynell would usually end up counseling these students too, but he took a different approach from that of Mrs. Turner.

When a student got into trouble, he would sometimes be sent to Lynell for work detail as punishment for the misbehavior. While Lynell and the student worked around the school grounds, they would talk. Lynell did more than just talk, though. He also listened. He listened to problems, frustrations, and aggressions. As he listened, he heard echoes of himself fourteen years ago. He sympathized and he encouraged. It was obvious that Lynell had a great concern for the future of the

students. He wanted the students to be all they could be.

The students responded to Lynell. He had a way of reaching the unreachable and the uncontrollable. He became their confidant. Sometimes they would skip class just to go help Lynell. Once when a parent asked our principal if he knew this was going on, he just replied, "If Lynell can get through to some of these kids, then more power to him!"

Thirty-two year-old Lynell had a certain wisdom that he readily shared with all those with whom he talked. He was an adult, but not so old that he could not understand our feelings and relate to them. It was a hard life that had brought him to this place in his life. As a teenager Lynell had dropped out of school, only to discover that the only job available to him was that of a janitor. He considered himself as a role model - of what students should not do. Lynell stressed to each student that the only way to a better life was through education. He also wanted the students to take pride in themselves and their work. He had two young daughters of his own and he had great dreams for their future. He was determined that they would get a good education and have a chance at a better future.

Jayce was the most undisciplined boy at our school. He was periodically sent to the principal's office. The principal, in turn, sent him to Mrs. Turner. Jayce did not like school or his studies. Learning was hard for him. He considered the rules stupid. How did they expect him to remember all of them anyway? Jayce skipped school regularly. Except for Lynell, nobody seemed to care. The teachers were glad not to have to deal with Jayce in their class and Jayce was glad not to have to deal with school. When he did attend school, Jayce like to hang out with Lynell and work with him.

Lynell saw a younger version of himself in Jayce, so he took a special interest in the boy. Although Jayce did poorly in his school subjects, Lynell noticed that Jayce had a real genius for mechanical gadgets. Jayce could operate or repair any machine put before him. Lynell began to suspect maybe all of Jayce's problems were not just attitude. He told his suspicions to some of Jayce's teachers who decided to have Jayce tested for learning disabilities. Jayce was then placed in a special program for students with his type of problem. Lynell reminded Jayce that it was now up to him to make the best of this opportunity. Jayce eventually graduated from high school and received a full scholarship to a vocational college. His biggest fan was always Lynell, who continued to encourage students to go their best and to take advantage of every opportunity to learn.

Life is what we make of it. Lynell had a lowly position in life, but he accepted responsibility for the consequences which had determined this position. Yet, he made the most of his life by fulfilling his job well. He even performed tasks outside his required duties for the betterment of our school. He also did his best to make sure none of us made the same mistakes he did in life. Lynell was not just a janitor. He was as much a disciplinarian, counselor, and teacher as anyone with a certificate. He taught from the book of life and experience.

Finding Reassurance in God's Creations

Robin Burnham

Death is something we never think about until it happens to someone we love. When loved ones die it seems like the heartache will never end. A sense of loneliness stays with us and it seems like life will never be the same without them. We need to realize, though, that their new eternal lives in heaven can never begin until their lives on earth end.

When my Mamaw died I went through a stage of shock. I couldn't believe that she was really gone. The shock left and reality set in when I saw her pale, cold body lying in her coffin. Finally realizing that she was gone, I burst into tears. All of my family was sobbing and sniffing and when I saw their emotions I knew that, like myself, they too had been in shock. No one really believed that she was dead until the casket was opened that morning in that dreadful funeral home. After we all saw her my family stood in a circle, held hands and prayed together. When our prayer was finished I left the room. I felt that I needed to escape from everyone else and to have a few minutes alone to mourn.

I went outside and just stood on the porch staring at the sky. I began to envision Mamaw in her blue bonnet picking peas out in her garden. Then I saw her in her kitchen making teacakes for anyone who happened to stop by. I was so taken in by her memories that I didn't hear a man walk up to me. He must have worked for the funeral home because I knew he wasn't a member of the family. He was smiling as he came and pointing to an object that I hadn't even noticed. It was a hummingbird feeder hanging from the edge of the roof, filled with sweet, red liquid. He then told me that he had been watching two hummingbirds fight over the feeder and asked if I had seen them. I replied that I had not.

The man went inside the funeral home and left me once again alone. I decided to look for the hummingbirds and see what amused the man about them. Just as soon as I looked up I saw the two birds flying toward the feeder. They were trying to keep each other from the sweet juice. As I watched the birds I didn't feel an idle amusement as the man had. What I felt was much more important. The liveliness and gaiety of the birds on a morning when it seemed life had stopped helped me realize that life must always go on. No matter what happens we must continue living. We can't stop the world every time something goes wrong. We are to live life to the fullest.

The hummingbird wasn't the only comforting reminder of ongoing life. As I looked at all the colorful flowers at the funeral home I remembered how Mamaw loved them. Everything seemed to remind me of her. Then I saw it. In the middle of one of the wreaths, a florist had placed a white dove, a symbol of peace. When I saw the dove I realized that I shouldn't mourn at all. Mamaw was at peace now and she was happier than we could ever imagine. After the funeral. I took the dove from the wreath. It is now in my room to remind me of the peace that I know Mamaw is experiencing.

The last of God's creations that caught my eye was the beautiful flowers on Mamaw's casket. They reminded me of my junior prom because the pink roses and orchids were the very same type of flowers that had created the boutinere for my date.

The prom had been a very happy day for me and those great memories came flooding back as I stared at the flower arrangement. The flowers comforted me and gave me a new sense of hope that the chance to make even greater memories lay ahead.

Yes, the deaths of those you love can be devastating but a brighter day is coming. One day you'll join them in heaven. Until then, look to God for strength. Leave your mind open to the natural beauties of the world and God will speak through them. You might find reassurance in something completely opposite from birds and flowers but if you look closely enough God will provide a form of encouragement just for you.



Vicki Ward

Little Angel

Lindsay Thompson

Laura sat on a bench near the edge of the park thinking about the significance of the day. Outwardly, it seemed to be such a beautiful, cheerful day — a day when nothing could go wrong. Laura saw straight through that pretty exterior though; after all, two years ago there had been another day just like this.

Laura had been rushing home from school to see her daddy. He had taken the day off from work, and they were planning to go to the zoo that afternoon. She knew just what he would do when he first saw her. He would toss her up in the air and give her a gigantic hug. He would then swing her around and around, and say he was teaching his little angel how to fly. When Laura arrived at her house she didn't find her daddy there getting ready to play with her and take her to the zoo. In fact, she didn't find her daddy at all.

Laura walked into the living room where all she could hear were sobs and muffled cries. Her mother was crying. Laura knew something must be wrong because her mother never cried.

Laura quickly snapped out of her thoughts as she realized what was going through her mind. She couldn't bear to relive that day anymore. She made a firm resolution to put it out of her mind. That wasn't an easy thing to do though. Her father was dead. That had been the most prominent thought in her mind for the last two years. When her father was still alive, Laura had been popular and smart. She had done her best in everything and was always eager to try something new. She had been happy. That had all changed now. Laura was now just barely passing school. She had alienated all of her friends and a smile had not graced her face in quite a while.

As she stood up to start the short walk home, a swing caught her eye. It was moving ever so slightly. A memory flooded her mind and caused a smile to play around her lips. Her father had often brought her to this same park. Together, they had swung on these very same swings. He had often told her that she could reach the clouds if only she went high enough. She had once been naive enough to believe that, but long ago the magic had gone from those words. Now, as she thought back on those fun-filled days spent with her father, she could feel the enchantment slowly coming back to her.

She walked hesitantly to the swing and sat down on it. Moving slowly at first, she began to swing higher and higher until she honestly felt as if she could touch the clouds. She reached out to grab one, but instead of the cottony softness she had expected, she felt two warm hands pulling her out of the swing. The hands pulled her ever so gently upward until she was once again looking directly into her father's eyes. At last, she truly was his little angel.

Drama

American Fairy Tales

Stacy Barham
Christy Feduccia
Mitch Holloway
Margaret Tynes

Characters: John Mark - Soap opera writer in mid-thirties

His creations:

Michael Mollie's husband, mid-twenties

Molly Michael's wife, mid-twenties, pregnant

Scott Molly's high school sweetheart, aged well

Susan Donald's long-time girlfriend

Donald Lawyer in early thirties

Ralph Psychiatrist, a large pushy man

Karen Jean's daughter, 25 years old

Lisa Jean's daughter, 19 years old

Maye Jean's daughter, 23 years old

Jean Mother of the daughters

Setting: Rear stage left, desk, lamp, coffee cup, typewriter, strewn papers, trash can overflowing, cigarette burning in ash tray, steno pad to John Mark's right.

Scene One

[John Mark is sitting at desk, hunched over typewriter thinking. Desk lamp is on. All of John Mark's lines are pre-recorded and played over house speakers as if he is thinking. Spotlight is on John Mark.]

John Mark: I swear, just how many bad things can happen to so few families? If it weren't for this blame war, I'd be lost. It's a writer's dream. Now, let's see, whose life do I want to endanger today? Hummm, let's start with Michael and Molly my central characters in World Affairs. They're happily married and he's about to be a father. This marital bliss is getting boring. How about we send good ole Michael to Saudi Arabia to risk his life over that ungrateful country. We gotta cheer Molly up though. I kinda like her.

[Spot goes off John Mark and comes up stage right. Michael and Molly are in a crowded airport, cardboard people are used for crowd.]

[Michael grasps Molly's hands and tries to console her.]

Michael: Don't worry, Honey, I'll be home before you know it.

Molly: I'm trying so hard to look on the bright side of this whole stupid mess, but it's so hard! [She bows her head and tears begin to fall.]

Michael: Molly, it'll be over before you know it and we'll be together again soon.

Molly: Aren't you even the slightest bit scared? Don't you wonder if you'll ever see your first child?

Michael: Ofcourse I do. My main concern is coming back to you and our baby. Those are the only two things that will keep me going.

Intercom: Flight 707 will be boarding in 10 minutes.

Molly: I can't believe you are leaving. I feel like I'll never see you again.

Michael: Don't say things like that. I'll definitely see you again. I don't know how long it will be, but I just have to.

[There is silence. Molly and Michael are standing in the overcrowded airport hugging tightly.]

Intercom: Flight 707 is now boarding.

Michael: Well, I guess this is goodbye for a while. I love you so much!

[Molly is still sobbing.]

Molly: I love you too. Promise me you'll be careful.

Michael: I'll try. Take care of yourself and the "little one." I'm gonna miss you!

Intercom: The last call for flight 707.

[Michael turns to walk to the gate. Molly turns around and begins to walk down the airport when she hears someone call her name.]

Scott: Molly Anderson is that you?

[Molly looks up with tears still in her eyes. She doesn't recognize him at first, but then she realizes.]

Molly: Scott McMillan! Oh my Gosh! I haven't seen you since graduation. [They hug.]

Scott: What in the world are you doing in the Los Angeles airport by yourself and in your condition?

Molly: It's a long story! Come sit down and I'll tell you all about it. That is if you're not in too big of a hurry. I never thought I'd see my old high school sweetheart after all this time.

Scott: I've got two hours until my flight to New York. So, you're in luck.

Scene Two

[Spot goes off stage right and comes up on John Mark. He has a satisfied look on his face.]

John Mark: Bye, Bye Mikey ole boy. Okay, who's my next victim?

[He checks his list to his right. Punches list with his finger as his decision is made.]

John Mark: Look out, Donald, here I come. You're about to become leg shackled!

[Spot goes down off John Mark. Comes up on Susan and Donald in a crowded Miami airport.]

Susan: Please don't go.

Donald: I have to.

Susan: There will be other job opportunities, Donald. For God's sake don't I mean anything to you?

Donald: How can you ask that? You know I love you. Probably more than I ever thought I could ever love someone. But this is my big chance. I mean I've been at the same law firm for six years now, and nothing. No promotion, not a recommendation. Barker and James is a powerful law firm in New York and they have offered me a junior partnership. Do you know what that means?

Susan: Yes, I know exactly what that means. It means you're leaving me and I probably won't ever see you again.

Donald: I have practically begged you, Susan, to come with me and you won't.

Susan: Donald, how can I leave my family and friends and my job? I grew up here, I work here. I can't leave. And . . .

Donald: And I can't stay. [Donald turns and collects his thoughts and then turns back.] Marry me.

Susan: What?

Donald: I love you, Susan. Marry me and move to New York with me.

Susan: I . . . I . . . I don't know. I mean, I don't know what to say.

Donald: Say yes. We can have the wedding here in Miami. I can leave and get established in New York and explain the situation to Barker and James and fly back for the wedding in two weeks, three at the most.

Susan: I don't know what to say. I don't know what I could tell my parents, my friends, my boss. Damn it Donald, this could be so easy if I didn't love you so much!

Intercom: Flight 313 to New York is now boarding.

Donald: That's me. So what's it going to be, Susan?

Susan: [Crying] I . . . I can't. I'm sorry. [They embrace] But I'll always love you. I hope you know that.

Donald: [Also crying] I do know, Susan. I love you so much. There won't be a day that goes by I won't think of you.

Susan: Promise?

Donald: I promise.

Susan: Good bye, Donald.

Donald: Good bye, Susan.

[They kiss. Donald then picks up his luggage and exits. Susan is still standing there.]

Susan: [In a soft voice, as she wipes tears from her cheek.] I'll always love you, Donald. Always.

[Spot goes down off stage right, setting is now inside of plane. Spotlight comes back up on Donald and Ralph.]

Ralph: [Leaning over toward Donald] Hi. I hate flying don't you? [Donald nods.] I was out here on business. I live in New York. Why are you leaving the Sunshine State?

Donald: It's a long story.

Ralph: It's a long flight. Hey, my name is Ralph. I don't think I caught yours.

Donald: Maybe 'cause I didn't throw it.

Ralph: Sorry. I was just trying to be social.

Donald: [Ducking his head] No. I'm sorry. I'm sorry I snapped at you. I've got a lot on my mind. [Pauses] My name's Donald.

Ralph: Nice to meet you, Donald. Is it anything you want to talk about? I'm a good listener.

Donald: No, thanks.

Ralph: It'll help to get it off your chest.

Donald: I'm really too depressed to talk.

Ralph: There are only two things in the world that can make a man that depressed, money or women. Now which one is it? Which one's got you so depressed that you're leaving Florida?

Donald: [Forcing a smile] I'm leaving my girlfriend for better money. [Pauses] God, that sounded awful. I mean, I'm leaving Florida for a better job.

Ralph: Oh, I see. Leaving the Mrs. behind, huh?

Donald: The want-to-be Mrs.

Ralph: Oh, one of those kinds.

Donald: I begged her to come with me, but she couldn't leave her family and friends. I guess it was a lot to ask.

Ralph: Do you love her?

Donald: You're pretty blunt, aren't you?

Ralph: Didn't mean to be. But do you?

Donald: Of course I do. I don't guess I'd be this miserable if I didn't. I did ask her to marry me.

Ralph: Sounds to me you want to keep her.

Donald: I don't know what I'm going to do without her.

Ralph: If you feel this strongly about her, what are you doing leaving her?

Donald: Good question. I don't know. [Puts his head into his hands] Wait a minute . . . I do know why I'm leaving. I'm leaving a job where I'm almost nobody, and going to New York where I'll make more money and live the good life.

Ralph: Without, what's her name . . .

Donald: Susan.

Ralph: Susan. Will Susan be living the good life, or will you for that matter?

Donald: What the hell is this? Are you a shrink or something? Where's your couch? Shouldn't I be lying down or something?

Ralph: I prefer to be called a psychiatrist. And you can lie in the aisle if it'll make you feel more comfortable.

Donald: Just my luck. I'm having the worst day of my life and I get to sit beside

a psych!

Ralph: Let's forget I'm a psych, all right? I'm talking to you as a guy who knows how it feels to almost lose someone you love.

Donald: What did you do, Mr. Freud?

Ralph: I married her. Everyday I tell her that I love her and she does the same. It's a good feeling, Donald. Sure, that extra money is going to be great, but I doubt you'll get that warm feeling from your money.

Donald: Well, what am I going to do?

Ralph: You can't have your cake and eat it too. I know I could have been more original, but I think that sums it up. I guess you have to decide what is more important.

Donald: How can I? I mean I love Susan with all my heart, but I also went through hell to get my degree so I could get this job opportunity.

Ralph: So let me get this straight. You're torn between two choices that are of equal importance?

Donald: Yeah, I guess.

Ralph: [Pulling a quarter out of his pocket.] Well, let fate decide. Heads it's Susan and tails it's New York.

Donald: You're joking, right?

Ralph: What have you got to lose? You aren't getting anywhere like this. Either way you go you're going to be miserable and think you made the wrong decision. This way, the decision is out of your hands. You ready?

Donald: No! Don't flip it. I don't want to know.

Ralph: Come on, Donald. It's the only way you're going to get this weight off your shoulders.

Donald: I don't know.

Ralph: [Teasing Donald with the quarter.] Come on, Donald. It's fate.

Donald: [Looking out the window, pauses for several moments then turns to Ralph and claps his hands together] Flip it!

[The quarter flies through the air. Ralph catches it and slaps it on his arm.]

Scene Three

[Spotlight goes down. Comes up on John Mark. Bored look on his face. He takes drag off cigarette.]

John Mark: Well, that was exciting [In a bored tone of voice]. I'm tired of dealing with people who are smarter than I am, getting their "big" chance in the academic world. I'm an artist myself. I pick and choose what world I want in next. Now, I think I'll hop on over to that dingbat family, the female Brady bunch. Let's see if I can't put an end to that over-active Jean for a while. She really gets on my nerves. Acts like Mother Teresa or something.

[Spotlight goes out as John Mark starts typing. Spotlight comes up stage right. Jean is sitting on a couch with her three daughters surrounding her. All are excited

and eager. There's also a coffee table and chair in this scene.]

Jean: Oh goodness, I just don't know where to begin! Hmmmm, let's see, I think I'll start here.[She opens a large box and pulls out a burgundy sweater.] Oh! This will go perfectly with my new paisley skirt. Oh honey, thanks so much. [To Maye. She opens another package and holds a silk scarf up to her new sweater.] Look, all this had to be planned. Thank you, Lisa. It's absolutely divine.

Lisa: You're welcome, Mother, and we'll just leave you wondering as to whether it was planned or not.

Jean: Oh, you girls are wonderful. Lisa, what's that in your hand?

Lisa: Oh, yeah. Daddy said for me to give this to you. He said to tell you again how sorry and disappointed he is that he had to work today.

[She hands an envelope to her mother. Her mother looks down disgruntled then shakes her head clear and rips open the envelope. She removes numerous 100 dollar bills and spreads them in front of her like cards.]

Karen: Oh, my gosh!

Lisa: How much is it?

Maye: Count it, count it!

Jean: [Still astonished and speechless.] Well, I think we all just got a feast at the most expensive restaurant in town. [She counts the bills and declares in awe.] Five hundred dollars.

[The three girls gasp and murmur among themselves for a short instant.]

Jean: This must have been what he's been saving up for the past few months. Oh, that was so sweet. I just wish that he could have been here to see all of this.

Maye: Mom, what about your last present?

Jean: Oh, Karen, I'm so sorry. I just got so excited and I guess I just

Karen: Mom, just open it!

[Jean tears into the tiny but elaborately wrapped package. She gasps.]

Jean: Chanel No. 5! This is my favorite!

Maye: Well, put some on!

Lisa: Yeah, let's smell it. Here, pass it over here.

Maye: Wait just a minute, let Mom try it first.

[Jean anxiously starts to open the bottle.]

Karen: WAIT! [Everyone stops to stare at Karen.] Oh, I'm sorry. Mom, you probably shouldn't put any on just now. It's really strong and well here, smell my wrist. I have a bottle too. I put mine on as soon as I bought it and it's still strong.

Lisa: When did you buy it?

Karen: The day before yesterday.

Lisa: What!?

Karen: I bought it the day before yesterday.

Maye: And it still hasn't worn off yet?

Karen: [Suddenly much calmer.] No, it's the greatest thing. Triple strength,

guaranteed to last for at least one week!

Jean: One week!?! Wow! Now, that's some potent stuff! [Pause] I just wish your father's company could have let him off today. Oh, well. Thank you again, and I love you so much! You all are the best daughters a couple could ever ask for. Come on, let's get ready to strut our stuff. We're going out!

[They all exit as spotlight goes down. Spot comes back up as Karen and Lisa are in the den speaking. Karen, Lisa, and Jean are all dressed to the nines.]

Lisa: Karen, do you think I'm underdressed? I mean, I've heard that this place is really nice.

Karen: Well, it is really nice, but then again so is your outfit. Anyway, those waiters in there are something else. I really doubt they'll condemn you for wearing such a cute mini-dress. [Slight pause.] Where's Mom?

Lisa: She's in the back. I think she's debating whether or not to try that perfume you gave her.

Karen: She hasn't worn it yet?

Lisa: She was probably just saving it.

[Karen goes to rear stage to peer up "stairway." Lisa leaves the room.]

Karen: Mom, you up there? Hey, Mom? [Mom comes through rear doorframe.] What time did you say you made the reservations for?

Jean: Seven-thirty. [Jean looks at Karen with approval.] You look absolutely stunning, sweetheart. I'm so glad we were able to make it. I just wish your father could have been here, but we all know he's done the best he could do and we need to remember that he's the one sending us out tonight. He's such a good man. He always does whatever he can to make his girls happy. I hope you never take him for granted.

Karen: I know. It seems like he was always there for me when I was just a little thing and he was always so eager to teach me new things and show me the time of my life even if we were only playing tee-ball in the backyard.

[The two are silent for a moment staring into space tearfully.]

Jean: Come on now, honey. This is no time for tears. We are going to have to really hustle if we are going to get there before they give our table to someone else. Here's a Kleenex. Now put on some powder and help me decide which cologne to wear.

Karen: What about the Chanel I gave you?

Jean: Well, I suppose I could, but well I'm just afraid it might be a little . . . No, I'm going to be brave and try it. I mean, I love it on you, but I'm just a little nervous about . . . Oh, me. Will I ever grow up? Here, hand me the box. Honey, put some of this on my wrist if you don't mind.

Karen: Not at all! [Dabs a tiny bit onto her mother's wrist.] There you go. Now smell it!

Jean: Oh!

[Jean falls to the floor in a dead faint. Hitting her head on the coffee table as

Karen: Help! Maye! Lisa! Somebody call an ambulance! [Quieter.] Oh, my gosh. Daddy, where are you when we need you? Mama?

[Spot goes down and comes back up on John Mark. He has a tired look on his face. He's slowly stretching. Takes a sip of coffee. Leans back in chair with hands laced behind his head.]

John Mark: Well, that's all folks. Another day in the miserable little life of my creations. Luckily, they are my creations and not me. Poor Donald, he doesn't know what he's in for. Maybe in a year or so — long enough for some real mental torture — I'll put him through a nice bitter divorce. I'll even add some good ole adultery with his long-lost cousin or something. Yeah, people oughta really eat that up. I'd just as soon get rid of peppy old Jean. I don't suppose that would be too good for ratings though. Oh well! I guess I could even throw my own opinion into Michael about this stupid war. Umph! Defending Arabs! They'd just as soon shoot us as look at us. At least I have my own private world to retreat to. I'm king there. One day there'll be happy endings for everybody. The true American fairy tale.

curtain

Honorable Mention
MCCCWA

